DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 378 419 CE 068 120

AUTHOR White, Ronnie W.; And Others
TITLE Perceptions of Directors, Administrators, and Staff Development Personnel Regarding the Importance of Selected Training Topics for Field-Based Personnel and Their Inclusion in Extension Training Programs. A National Study.
PUB DATE Dec 94
NOTE 9p.; Paper presented at the American Vocational Association Convention (Dallas, TX, December 9-13, 1994).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Administrator Attitudes; Adult Education; Educational Attitudes; Educational Needs; *Extension Agents; Extension Education; *Inservice Education; *On the Job Training; *Preretirement Education; *Staff Orientation; Training Objectives

ABSTRACT

A study was conducted to assess the perceptions of extension directors, administrators, and staff development personnel regarding the importance of selected training topics and to determine the extent to which these topics are included in current training programs for extension personnel. A descriptive survey using a five-point Likert-type scale asking respondents to rate the importance of selected topics in orientation, inservice, and preretirement training was developed and mailed to all 148 extension directors, administrators, and staff development personnel in the United States. Usable responses were obtained from 85 percent of the subjects (126). In the area of orientation training, "extension communication and teaching methods" was rated the most important orientation topic for new field personnel, but only 75 percent indicated that this topic was covered in the training. "Coalition building" was rated the most important inservice topic, and 86 percent indicated this topic was included in the training. In addition, "subject matter training" was rated the second most important topic and was included in 96 percent of the training. All respondents rated "income planning" as the most important component of preretirement training; it was included in 62 percent of the training. The study concluded that the training topics included in training programs for extension personnel are not necessarily the ones perceived most important by the respondents. Recommendations were made to reassess the topics for training programs and to make adjustments as determined by personnel needs. (KC)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 378 419

PERCEPTIONS OF DIRECTORS, ADMINISTRATORS, AND STAFF DEVELOPMENT PERSONNEL REGARDING THE IMPORTANCE OF SELECTED TRAINING TOPICS FOR FIELD-BASED PERSONNEL AND THEIR INCLUSION IN EXTENSION TRAINING PROGRAMS

A NATIONAL STUDY

By

Ronnie W. White
Assistant Human Resources Officer
Mississippi Cooperative Extension Service
Mississippi State University

Walter N. Taylor
Professor and
Head of
Agricultural Education and
Experimental Statistics
Mississippi State University

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
R White
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

James N. Butler, Jr.
Graduate Research Assistant
Program of Research and Evaluation
for Public Schools (PREPS)
Mississippi State University

Mississippi Cooperative Extension Service
Room 316 Bost Extension Center
Mississippi State, MS 39762
(601) 325 - 3462

CE062120

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

INTRODUCTION

The Cooperative Extension Service is experiencing transition and rapid change. As a result, Extension is addressing such issues as retraining present staff, attracting professionals who possess the necessary skills and backgrounds and who have the ability to communicate and network (Strategic Planning Council, 1991).

Subject matter competency, skills, and knowledge vary with each Extension professional depending upon his/her experience, type of orientation, inservice, and preretirement training received. Coupled with limited funding, fewer staff, and the utilization of new technology, staff development programs will be essential to each Extension professional.

Orientation training begins on the first day of employment, and continues for one year. According to ECOP (1987), Extension personnel will likely have the following orientation training needs:

1. Extension philosophy, history, organization, policies internal procedures, including those which assure equal opportunity in programs and employment.
2. The methods and procedures, essential for planning, implementing, evaluating, and reporting Extension programs.
3. Roles and relationships within the Extension system.
4. Relationships with the total university and external agencies.
5. Human, technical, and other support resources available.
6. Personnel policies, procedures, expectations, and performance criteria related to specific work involved in the assigned position.
7. Staff development and career opportunities available for future growth and development. (p. 11)

New technologies, such as satellites and computers, are now more prevalent in Extension offices. In addition to satellites and computers, other types of technology such as video teleconferencing, satellite programming, and desktop publishing may be powerful tools for Extension programming. Goode (1990) reported that Extension personnel rely on administration for staying current with computer and other technologies via inservice training.

Another area that has received attention recently is preretirement training. Preretirement training, as suggested by Peterson (1986), provides individuals with opportunities that help them with the uncertainties of retirement. Becker, Jimmerson, Lamberts, and Trail (1983) reported that regardless of age or tenure, income topics were rated as extremely important in preretirement training.

Dynamic changes in technology, staffing patterns, and national issues have led to the need for new and different types of training for field-based personnel. According to the literature, field-based personnel will need staff development in educational methods, subject matter applications, and new technology to remain current. As a result, Extension directors, administrators, and staff development personnel are being challenged to provide field-based personnel with the necessary training which enhances their skills and abilities to successfully deliver quality programs to a diverse and expanding audience. Extension directors, administrators, and staff development personnel are directly responsible for

implementing the training needed by field-based personnel. Therefore, the topics perceived to be most important by these groups should be the ones included in training programs for Extension field-based personnel.

PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES

This study was conducted to assess the perceptions of directors, administrators, and staff development personnel regarding the importance of selected training topics and to determine the extent to which these topics are included in current training programs. Information was needed to provide administrative personnel with some guidance as to the most important training topics for field-based personnel. This information should allow for better staff development decisions which will benefit the entire Extension organization. The specific objectives of the study were to: (1) determine the perceptions of directors, administrators, and staff development personnel regarding the importance of selected orientation, inservice, and preretirement training topics for field-based personnel, and (2) determine the extent of inclusion of these topics in Extension training programs.

PROCEDURES

The research was a descriptive-survey. The population consisted of all Extension directors, administrators, and staff development personnel from all 1862 and 1890 institutions in the United States. The total population of 148 was surveyed. The instrument was constructed using suggestions from the Total Design Method developed by Dillman (1978). The instrument was divided into the following sections: (a) orientation training, (b) inservice training, and (c) preretirement training. A five-point Likert-type scale was used to rate the importance of selected training topics.

A panel of experts from the Mississippi Cooperative Extension Service and the faculty in the Department of Agricultural Education and Experimental Statistics at Mississippi State University assisted in validating the instrument. Additionally, the instrument was pilot tested to improve content validity. The test-retest coefficient of stability calculated on the rated items yielded a median coefficient of .70. A Cronbach's alpha was computed on the first set of responses from the test-retest to determine the internal consistency of the rated items. The resulting alpha coefficient was .91.

Questionnaire packets were mailed to all Extension directors, administrators, and staff development personnel. A second letter and questionnaire was mailed, followed by phone calls, to all nonrespondents. Responses were obtained from 84% of the population.

ANALYSIS OF DATA

Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics. Mean importance ratings of the orientation, inservice and preretirement training topics along with

percentages of inclusion were reported.

RESULTS

Orientation training

Extension communication and teaching methods was rated the most important (M = 4.1) orientation topic for new field-based personnel when the responses from all three groups were combined. However, only 75% indicated that this topic was included in their orientation training. Although Extension history and philosophy and staff development and career opportunities received a mean rating of 3.6, 88% indicated that this topic was included in their orientation training. This information is presented in Table 1.

Insert Table 1 about here

Inservice Training

Data from all respondents indicated that coalition building was the most important (M = 4.2) inservice training topic for field-based personnel. Eighty-nine percent of the respondents indicated this topic was included in their inservice training. Using computers and subject matter training were the two items rated second most important (M = 4.1). Ninety-six percent of the respondents, however, indicated that subject matter training was included in their inservice training, and 90% reported that using computers was included (see Table 2).

Insert Table 2 about here

Preretirement Training

All respondents rated income planning as the most important (M = 4.1) preretirement training topic. Least important (M = 2.7) was activities and hobbies. Although the percentages of respondents was very consistent with the mean importance ratings, the percentages were relatively low. These figures are presented in Table 3.

Insert Table 3 about here

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Training topics included in training programs for Extension field-based personnel are not necessarily the ones perceived most important by directors, administrators, and staff development personnel. In the area of orientation training, there appears to be little congruency between what is perceived to be important and what is actually included in this type training. The topic which was included the most in orientation training programs was rated as the fifth most important topic out of the six topics selected in this area. The most important orientation topic is included in only 75% of the respondents orientation training. Coalition building was rated as the most important inservice training topic, but was not the one reported being the most included in inservice training programs. Although there was only a small difference in mean ratings among the items perceived as being the most important and subject matter training was rated third, it was the one reported as being included the most in inservice training programs. While evaluating issues programs received a rating indicating that it was a very important topic, it was not included extensively in current inservice training programs.

Except for income planning, the selected topics for preretirement training included in this study did not receive very high importance ratings. None of the topics were reported as being included to a great extent in the current training.

The following recommendations were made; (a) directors, administrators, and staff development personnel should jointly make a reassessment of the topics currently included in Extension orientation, inservice, and preretirement training programs, (b) concrete criteria should be established and used for selecting training topics, (c) if the topics that receive the highest mean ratings are the most important, then they should have priority for placement in training programs, and (d) further study be conducted to determine the perceptions of field-based personnel regarding topics to be included in Extension training programs.

REFERENCES

Becker, M. J., Jimmerson, R. M., Lamberts, M. B., & Trial, T. F. (1983). Is preretirement training important? Journal of Extension, 21, 10 - 14.

Dillman, D. A. (1978). Mail and telephone surveys: The total design method. New York: John Wiley.

ECOP, & USDA (1989). New directions for a new decade. A report to the cooperative extension system. Washington, DC.

Goode, D. Z., Jr. (1990). Computer applications and computer technology transfer by Mississippi extension personnel: An evaluation of involvement, competencies, and training. Doctoral Dissertation, Mississippi State University.

Peterson, D. L. (1986). Retirement in Illinois community college. Illinois State University. (Eric Document Reproduction Service No. ED274402)

Strategic Planning Council. (1991). Patterns of change. A report of the cooperative extension system planning council, Washington, DC.

Table 1

Ratings of Mean Importance and Percent Indicating Inclusion of Orientation Training Topics

Orientation Training Topics	Mean	% Indicating Inclusion
Extension Communication and Teaching Methods	4.1	75.0
Personnel Policies and Performance Criteria Related to the Position	4.0	86.0
Extension Operational Policies and Procedures	3.9	85.5
Extension Organization and Structure	3.8	86.3
Extension History and Philosophy	3.6	87.9
Staff Development and Career Opportunities	3.6	75.8

Note. Scale: 1 = not important, 2 = somewhat important, 3 = important, 4 = very important, 5 = essential.

Table 2

Ratings of Mean Importance and Percent Indicating Inclusion of Inservice Training Topics

Inservice Training Topics	Mean	% Indicating Inclusion
Coalition Building	4.2	88.7
Using Computers	4.1	89.5
Subject Matter Training	4.1	96.0
Using New Technologies Effectively	4.0	76.6
Evaluating Issues Programs	4.0	65.3
Identifying Audiences in Issues Programs	3.9	73.3
Using New Delivery Methods	3.9	78.2
Identifying Additional Resources	3.9	83.9
Turning Issues into Programs	3.8	71.7
Accepting Issues Programming	3.5	70.9
Managing Multicounty Roles	3.5	55.6
Using Satellite Programming	3.3	55.6
Using Video Teleconferencing	3.1	41.1
Using Interactive Video	3.0	36.3
Desktop Publishing	2.9	36.3

Note. Scale: 1 = not important, 2 = somewhat important, 3 = important, 4 = very important, 5 = essential.

Table 3

Ratings of Mean Importance and Percent Indicating Inclusion of Preretirement Topics

Preretirement Training Topics	Mean	% Indicating Inclusion
Income Planning	4.1	62.1
General Planning Skills	3.5	46.0
Ways for Retirees to Remain a Resource	3.2	26.6
Activities and Hobbies	2.7	22.6

Note. Scale: 1 = not important, 2 = somewhat important, 3 = important, 4 = very important, 5 = essential.